

ABSTRACT

Introduction Cultural (intercultural) competence consist in presenting uniform attitudes, behaviour and rules to enable cooperation with patients of different cultural backgrounds. Cultural competence improves the quality of the provided medical care by reducing the stress experienced by paramedics while assisting a culturally different patient and enables a better understanding of their needs. The lack of cultural competence may be a source of prejudice, conflicts and paramedic's negative attitude to the patient. In the Polish-language literature on the subject there are no publications on the cultural competence of paramedics.

Objective The objective of the study was to assess the cultural competence of paramedics working within the National Medical Rescue System (NMR System) in the Podkarpackie and Zachodniopomorskie Province.

Material and methods The surveyed group consisted of all paramedics working in the NMR System in the Podkarpackie and Zachodniopomorskie Province. The questionnaire was completed by a total of 646 paramedics working within the NMR System. The number of accurately completed questionnaires was 347 in the Podkarpackie Province and 216 in the Zachodniopomorskie Province (563 questionnaires in total, with 334 being the representative number for the population under study). The survey was carried out with the use of the questionnaire for assessing the cultural competence of medical personnel – the Healthcare Provider Cultural Competence Instrument (HPCCI), translated into Polish and validated. The original version of the scale was developed by Schwarz et al. in 2015.

Results Paramedics working in both provinces obtained the highest average cultural competence results in the "awareness and sensitivity" subscale (3.90 ± 0.64), and the lowest in the patient-focussed "practice orientation" subscale (3.01 ± 0.50).

In both provinces the highest average for cultural competence was recorded by rescuers with Master's degree in other field and Bachelor's degree in medical rescue. The lowest average values among paramedics who graduated from post-secondary schools and Bachelor's studies with a medical rescue speciality. The results obtained in the Podkarpackie Province point to the lack of differences in cultural competence among people who declared that they belonged to a religion and others. In the Zachodniopomorskie Province the average results for people declaring a religion were higher. For 1/3 of the respondents foreign trips did not change the perception of people representing different cultures, and for 1/3 they did (more people from the group worked in the Podkarpackie Province). Paramedics who spoke a foreign language

had higher average cultural competence results as compared to the paramedics who did not present foreign language skills. Paramedics from the Podkarpackie Province (3.56 ± 0.67) had greater educational needs than their colleagues from the Zachodniopomorskie Province (2.84 ± 0.82). Those needs increased with age.

Conclusions:

1. 28.06% of the surveyed paramedics personally experienced a difficult situation while providing medical assistance to patients with a different cultural background.
2. Paramedics assess their cultural competence highly, although 98.2% of the respondents were not trained in this area.
3. Paramedics had positive perceptions of people of different cultures. Stereotypes and prejudices were found in the answers of 33% of the surveyed, more often among paramedics from the Podkarpackie Province.
4. The self-assessment of cultural competence is age-dependent (the older the paramedic, the higher their self-assessment level of cultural competence), education (the more educated the paramedic, the more often they believed to be prepared to provide culturally competent assistance to patients in life- and health-threatening situations), foreign language skills (the higher the skills, the higher the paramedic's assessment of their cultural competence), the place of work (paramedics working in medical rescue teams had a higher self-assessment of their cultural competence than those working in hospital emergency departments).
5. Paramedics from the Podkarpackie Province declare a higher level of cultural competence, which is associated with their older age, higher job seniority, better foreign language skills, and also greater interest in developing their foreign language skills and in improving their abilities to work with culturally different patients. Paramedics from the Podkarpackie Province had lower educational attainments and less often travelled abroad as compared to those from the Zachodniopomorskie Province. Foreign trips are an occasion for practical verification of one's cultural competence, so the general assessment of cultural competence in the Zachodniopomorskie Province may be lower than in the Podkarpackie Province. .
6. Paramedics reported high demand for training in cultural competence, mainly in the form of workshops with experts representing various ethnic and religious groups and conferences with lectures delivered by experts in multicultural medical rescue.

Key words: cultural competence, paramedics, the National Medical Rescue System, multicultural education, educational needs